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ABSTRACT

A system was developed for program evaluation throughout the university. It provides the user with guidelines, procedures, materials, and resources to conduct evaluations for the improvement of teaching skills and methods, course development, and administrative decisionmaking about curricular matters. The evaluation process is intended to be flexible enough for application to a variety of disciplines, and consists of four components: (1) a workshop for users; (2) an evaluation scheme handbook; (3) resource files of existing materials relating to each stage in the evaluation process, so that prescriptiveness can be avoided; and (4) evaluation specialists and consultants available for guidance. The process is outlined in steps that culminate in action toward improvement. (MSE)

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learning and development

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THE DESCRIPTION OF A FACULTY AND COURSE EVALUATION SCHEME

JULIAN AVISS

WHY EVALUATION?

Evaluation has become an integral part of the educational process. At the same time as universities are being faced with shrinking budgets, they are also being held more and more "accountable" to students, governments, and the community at large. On one hand, university administrators and departmental chairmen are being asked to judge the quality of education offered in order to make decisions about revising programmes, promoting faculty, and granting tenure. On the other hand, individual professors are becoming aware of the need to evaluate their own courses and teaching methods to see if improvements can be made. The importance of such evaluation has been underlined, here at McGill, by the Senate decree that, whenever possible, evaluation of teaching effectiveness should be considered in decisions regarding the appointment, promotion, and tenure of faculty.

HISTORY OF THE FACULTY AND COURSE EVALUATION SCHEME

In response to these developments, a committee was set up in early 1976 under the chairmanship of Dr. Gene Cave, director of the Office of Educational Development. The committee was asked to examine the possibility of preparing an equitable and comprehensive evaluation system to be offered for use both in administrative decision-making and in the development and improvement of all aspects of university teaching.

The committee recognized the dangers of universal "systems" of evaluation. All too often, such systems are either inflexible and over-prescriptive, or simplistic to the point of irrelevancy. Members

EVALUATION WORKSHOP

A workshop will be held on October 26th from 4:00-6:00 p.m. in the Ruttan Room, 2nd Floor of the MacDonald Chemistry Building. The evaluation scheme will be introduced to any faculty members who are interested in evaluation either for improvement or for administrative decision-making. If you plan to attend, please call 392-4309 and leave your name with Felicity Stone before October 20th.

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of the committee felt that any evaluation "package" should require genuine effort and sophistication on the part of the user, but without the need for expertise in the field of evaluation, or undue familiarity with an esoteric technical vocabulary. In addition, the system should be flexible enough to cater to differing individual needs, and the onus for the successful completion of the evaluation process should rest with the user.

The Centre for Learning and Development received a mandate to design an evaluation scheme to be offered for use on our campus. Work began in earnest in the fall of 1976 when Pat Cranton joined the Centre and took over responsibility for the project. The evaluation system is now ready for pilot use.

PRINCIPLES OF THE SCHEME

The Faculty and Course Evaluation Scheme provides the user with guidelines, procedures, materials and resources to conduct evaluations for the improvement of teaching skills and methods, and for course development, as well as for making administrative decisions about a course, a programme, or the teaching ability of a faculty member. The flexibility of the procedures makes them suitable for a wide variety of applications in many different academic disciplines. In addition, the proposed McGill evaluation scheme is designed to reduce the possibility of arbitrary judgements. All in all, the evaluation package is intended to produce a thorough, equitable, and systematic but flexible evaluation process. Finally, although the scheme may be used as a basis for making administrative decisions regarding promotion, tenure, and the like, the basic philosophy expounded stresses the importance of development and improvement rather than censure.

It was felt that the establishment of certain principles governing the use of the evaluation plan would help ensure that the "spirit" of the scheme would be upheld. The evaluation plan is rather like a contract - "I'll agree to abide by the results of the evaluation if we can agree on the methods of obtaining those results." Accordingly, any professor involved in an evaluation must agree to the evaluation and will maintain complete control over the results. Further, each component of the evaluation plan will be examined and agreed to by all the involved parties. Lastly, in the event of a promotion or tenure decision, there must be negotiation and discussion between the professor and his or her chairperson or committee.

FORMAT OF THE SCHEME

The evaluation system includes four main components:

1. *WORKSHOPS* - a) A workshop to introduce potential users to the general principles, purposes, and functions of the evaluation system, as well as to the major concepts of evaluation per se. The importance of evaluation in course and teaching improvement will be stressed. b) Further workshops will be available for groups or departments intending to implement the evaluation plan. At this point, participants will be guided through the use of an evaluation system handbook and a set of resource files by examining one or more cases when the evaluation scheme might be used.

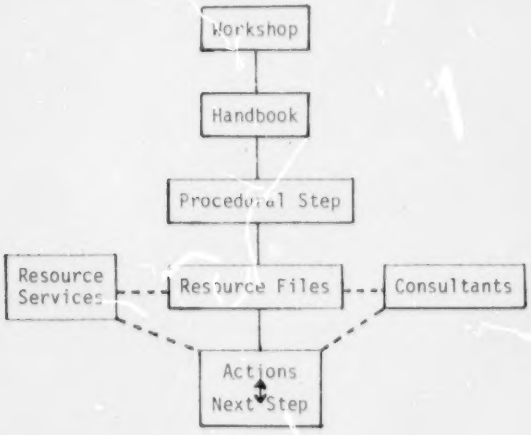
2. *THE EVALUATION SCHEME HANDBOOK* - Evaluation for the purpose of improvement differs somewhat from evaluation for administrative purposes. It was, therefore, decided to develop two separate handbooks or guides to the use of the evaluation system. A small introduction, common to both handbooks, allows the user to decide which guide ministers to his or her primary needs. In broad outline, however, the two handbooks are almost identical. Each handbook guides an individual or a group through a series of procedural "steps" that should result in a detailed, equitable and objective evaluation with practical and valuable applications. Each "step" in the evaluation procedure requires the use of "resources" beyond the handbook itself - for example, a professor may require detailed information on the validity of student rating of teaching skills. Alternatively, the professor may want information about services to improve his or her teaching skills such as those offered at McGill by the Instructional Development Services Project. For this reason, the handbooks are linked to a set of resource files. The emphasis is on providing the user with a "framework" for evaluation. Whenever possible, the handbook user is referred to resources already available at McGill - resources that have proven valuable in the past.

3. *THE RESOURCE FILES* contain existing materials, resources, articles and references relating to each stage in the eval-

uation process. Prescriptiveness is avoided. Instead, a "branching" effect is created: guided by the handbook, the user follows an individualized path through the resource files and makes individual judgements about what is valid or relevant to his or her evaluation purposes. If further guidance is required, the handbook user can refer to the evaluation consultants and services specified in the resource files.

4. THE EVALUATION SPECIALISTS AND CONSULTANTS are available whenever the handbook user feels in need of either general or specific guidance or advice.

FIGURE 1 - EVALUATION SCHEME FORMAT



STEPS IN THE SCHEME

The evaluation scheme involves seven basic steps. The level to which each step is followed depends upon the particular situation and the intended application of the evaluation.

STEP 1: SPECIFYING THE PURPOSE(S) OF THE EVALUATION

The first task is to answer three key questions: *Why* are we evaluating? *What* are we evaluating? *What kinds* of changes or decisions will we make as a result of the evaluation? During Step 1, the user specifies the purpose(s) of the evaluation including the types of decisions or changes that may be made as a result - i.e., what the user wants to do. This may involve describing course goals or objectives. The handbooks provide the reader with techniques for focussing discussion, clarifying programme goals, etc., so as to elucidate the *specific* purposes of the evaluation. The resource files contain more detailed information together with general articles about the meaning of evaluation.

STEP 2: LISTING COURSE, PROGRAMME AND/OR TEACHING FUNCTIONS

The user now lists the particular teaching roles or skills and course or programme functions that are relevant to the particular situation. In terms of teaching roles, for example, a professor may be interested in his or her skill as a seminar leader rather than as a lecturer to a large class. Again, a group of professors who want to judge if their introductory course fulfils its function may be interested in seeing if the course conveys a particular set of basic facts rather than a narrower, in-depth knowledge of a segment of the field. In essence, priorities are being set. What is this course intended to do? What teaching role is relevant to the purpose of the evaluation?

STEP 3: SELECTING THE SOURCES OF INFORMATION TO BE USED IN THE EVALUATION AND THE METHODS FOR GATHERING IT

Referring to the resource files, the user selects sources of information he or she will use including faculty, students, administrators, outside evaluators, and so on. Whenever possible, two different groups should be used as a "cross-check". The user also explores the possible techniques that can be used to gather information - interviews, questionnaires, observations, etc. Choice of techniques depends upon the source of information, the function, roles or skills being evaluated, and the overall purpose of the evaluation. Use of more than one technique also acts as a "cross-check".

STEP 4: DETERMINING OR SETTING THE STANDARDS OR CRITERIA FOR USE IN THE DECISION-MAKING

Whatever the sources and means of collecting information, the user must decide what standards are relevant to the decision-making. If 90% of a class find a professor's lectures too difficult, for example, changes are obviously called for. What, however, if 50% or 40% of the students find the lectures too difficult?

STEP 5: *DECIDING UPON ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN AS A RESULT OF THE EVALUATION*

The question being answered at this stage is, "What will actually be done as a result of the evaluation?" In a sense, Step 5 is an elaboration of Step 1. The resource files contain procedures to help the user specify the possible alternatives. The resource files also include descriptions of resources that may assist in the improvement and development of courses and teaching. The user reviews the time and resources available and plans in detail what will be done with the evaluation results.

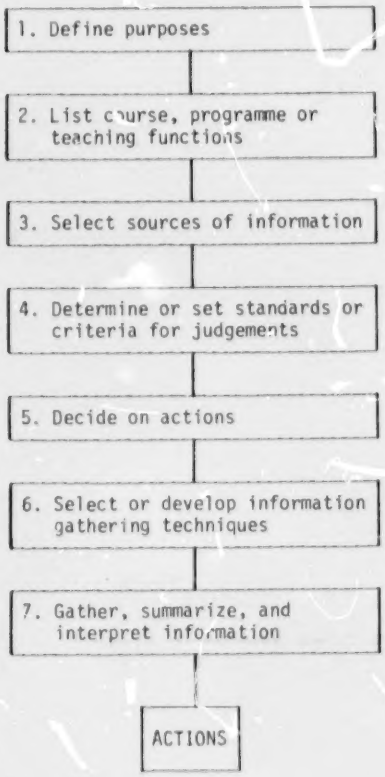
STEP 6: *SELECTING OR DEVELOPING TECHNIQUES TO GATHER INFORMATION*

The handbook user is now ready to select his or her specific tests or techniques for the evaluation. The resource files contain lists and descriptions of techniques and tests together with working samples and analyses of their validity. Flexibility is stressed at this point - a user may have unique needs in terms of evaluation. Consultation with CLD or IDSP staff may help the user develop a technique that ministers to his or her specific needs.

STEP 7: *GATHERING, SUMMARIZING AND INTERPRETING THE INFORMATION*

If the previous steps have been conscientiously followed, Step 7 should be relatively straightforward. Actual procedures will depend upon the particular evaluation process. The information is collected; analysis or summary of the results is done; the information is then applied to the plans and decisions outlined earlier. The resource files contain information in areas like techniques of statistical analysis, methods for implementing change, etc. The role of consultants, however, is probably key at this final stage in the evaluation process.

FIGURE 2 - STEPS IN THE EVALUATION SCHEME


1. Define purposes
2. List course, programme or teaching functions
3. Select sources of information
4. Determine or set standards or criteria for judgements
5. Decide on actions
6. Select or develop information gathering techniques
7. Gather, summarize, and interpret information
ACTIONS

* The Faculty and Course Evaluation Scheme is in its "pilot" stage. We believe it will answer the needs both of individuals and of groups wishing to find a way to evaluate and improve all aspects of the teaching process. However, the success of the system depends upon whether those who use it actually achieve their aims. For that reason, we urge you to help us evaluate this evaluation scheme!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

On September 1st, Julian Aviss joined the CLD academic staff as project director. His responsibilities this year will include directing publications, managing the teaching-learning course, assisting in the development of the evaluation guide and working with several departments on programme design and evaluation.

Mr. Aviss came to McGill in 1971 from England, where he received a B.A. in English and Philosophy from the University of Kent at Canterbury. At McGill he held a McConnell Fellowship and teaching-assistantship in the Department of English for five years and is currently completing his Ph.D. dissertation in English literature. He has been involved with CLD since early 1977, helping to develop the evaluation guide.